

7. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public input to the I-405 Corridor Program is an essential element of the environmental analysis, documentation, and review process. The purpose of the public involvement program is to build local and regional consensus leading to decisions about major I-405 investments. The public involvement program seeks to establish informed public consent for a strategy to improve mobility in the I-405 corridor.

A comprehensive public involvement and information program was developed and implemented at the onset of the decision-making and environmental analysis process. A public involvement plan, with specific goals and activities, was produced and made available for public review. A wide range of activities and resources has been available to incorporate public participation in the program. These include newsletters, public and agency briefings, project web site, media outreach, and public meetings and forums. The project web site has served as a communication nexus, providing current information and a complete record of all project documents for easy public access.

Public input has contributed to the decision-making and evaluation process including scoping, determination of which alternatives should be advanced for further evaluation in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and in the selection of a preliminary preferred alternative prior to the Draft EIS, and selection of the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS.

The public involvement during the review period for the Draft EIS included three (north, central, and south corridor) public hearings in addition to numerous other public outreach activities. The public meetings were held to receive comments and answer questions about the project in accordance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Please refer also to Appendix G of the FEIS for a description of public involvement activities that were targeted to low-income and minority groups.

7.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

The I-405 Corridor Program public involvement plan was designed to give as many stakeholders and members of the public as possible the opportunity to participate in the I-405 evaluation and decision-making process. First, the outreach elements in the public involvement plan alert the public to the program, its purpose and need, and how they can participate. Informational elements enable members of the public to understand the program vision, goals, and objectives, as well as the issues and the decision-making process. The interactive components of the plan provide stakeholders with opportunities to participate and provide input into the process.

The goals for the public involvement plan are:

- Provide all parties with a clear understanding of mobility problems on I-405;
- Instill confidence that the I-405 Corridor Program can accomplish something meaningful, but with the understanding that it does require tough choices to be made;
- Give the various stakeholder groups opportunities for meaningful dialogue and creative problem-solving;
- Disseminate information to the public in a clear and timely manner about issues related to the I-405 Corridor Program;

- Make program information easily accessible to anyone interested at any time;
- Provide as much quantitative information as possible about the program and the alternatives under consideration;
- Deliver program information to target audiences in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible; and
- Receive, review, and document all public input.

There were a number of ways for the public to get more information during the EIS process:

- Sign up for the project mailing or e-mail list to receive the program newsletter and information;
- Call the project information line at (206) 464-5878;
- Visit the project web site for updates, news and technical information: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/I-405>;
- Schedule a presentation for an organization;
- Attend public meetings/forums; and
- Attend any of the program's Executive, Steering or Citizen Committee meetings.

The I-405 Corridor Program's public involvement process has been inclusive of all members of the public. All meetings for the project have conformed to all Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and materials are available in formats accessible to everyone.

A summary of public involvement activities that were conducted by the I-405 Corridor Program in support of the EIS and decision-making process is presented below.

7.2 PROJECT COMMITTEES

An unprecedented partnership of federal, state, and local elected officials, agency staff, and private citizens has guided decision-making for the I-405 Corridor Program. Nearly 100 federal, state, regional, and local agency representatives and environmental, business, and local citizen representatives have served on one of three committees:

- The **Executive Committee** provides vision, policy, and oversight in the development of the I-405 Corridor Program. Committee membership includes community and agency leaders representing local and county government, Puget Sound Regional Council, Washington State Transportation Commission, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), Sound Transit, and the State Legislature. The committee interacts with and receives input and recommendations from the Citizen Committee, Steering Committee, and project management team.
- The **Steering Committee**, composed of senior staff from the affected agencies, is responsible for providing guidance to the project and process, and guiding the project management team. The Steering Committee makes recommendations to the Executive Committee and seeks their strategic counsel.

- The **Citizen Committee**, made up of public volunteers representing a wide range of interests all along the corridor, was primarily responsible for providing advisory input to the Executive Committee at key points during the development and evaluation of corridor alternatives. Committee members worked with their communities to reach out and involve them in the decision-making process. The Citizen Committee concluded its advisory work in Fall 2001 following the development of recommendations for the Preferred Alternative. The Executive Committee gave considerable weight to the recommendations provided by the Citizen Committee.

The committees interacted with each other through joint meetings and other communication methods. All committee meetings were open to the public and included time for public comment. Meeting information was posted on the I-405 Corridor Program's web site for public review.

As of April 2002, the three program committees had met collectively over 80 times, including formal meetings and informal information sharing and discussion forums.

7.3 FORMAL PUBLIC MEETINGS

Five public meetings on EIS scoping and alternatives selection were held in the following communities:

Scoping Meetings: 59 people attended

October 19, 1999 Renton

October 21, 1999 Kirkland

Initial Alternative Concepts Open House: 71 people attended

April 18, 2000 Redmond

Alternatives and Preliminary Preferred Alternative Open Houses: 80 people attended

March 20, 2001 Bothell

March 22, 2001 Renton

Public Hearings on Draft EIS: 200 people attended

September 18, 2001 Bothell

September 19, 2001 Renton

September 20, 2001 Bellevue

To announce the Draft EIS hearings, news releases were sent to news media and display ads were published twice in all regional and local newspapers serving the I-405 corridor.

7.4 PUBLIC SCOPING – SUGGESTIONS AND ISSUES

More than 150 suggestions for transportation improvements were received through public scoping for the I-405 Corridor Program. Suggestions covered a wide range of physical and non-construction solutions that affected all travel modes and were dispersed throughout the study area and beyond. Each suggestion was recorded, considered, and evaluated either independently or as part of one or more themes during the screening process employed to develop the range of EIS alternatives.

Issues identified through public scoping frequently involved the following:

- Mobility for commuters, truck freight, and non-motorized vehicles;
- Travel times and travel speeds;
- HOV lanes and HOV definition;
- Lane balance;
- Traffic safety and accident reduction;
- Incident management and response;
- Local and express bus transit service;
- High-capacity transit, including light rail, commuter rail, monorail, bus rapid transit, and emerging technologies;
- Arterials, continuity, and system capacity;
- Tolls and managed lane concepts;
- Environmental quality, including especially air quality, noise, fish, pedestrian-oriented development and land use planning, cut-through traffic in neighborhoods, potential for displacements, and construction impacts;
- Environmental mitigation, especially using sound walls and lids on freeway sections; and
- Project costs and potential construction schedules.

All recorded comments were considered during development of the EIS scope and as part of the methodology reports that guided the analysis of technical issues in the EIS.

7.5 PUBLIC INFORMATION MATERIALS

7.5.1 Newsletters

Six newsletters (Fall 1999, Spring 2000, Fall 2000, Spring 2001, Summer 2001, and Winter 2002) containing project information, public meeting announcements, and related were distributed to residents, businesses, and public information centers such as libraries and city halls in and around the study area. An additional 5,000 people received the newsletters by being on project mailing lists. The primary purpose of the newsletter was to report the status of the I-405 Corridor Program and explain the environmental analysis, documentation, and review process with special emphasis on the opportunities for public input on the alternatives being considered. The newsletter also helped publicize and promote the use of the project web site, info line, and other input and information opportunities.

Two of the newsletters contained questionnaires developed to provide ongoing quantitative feedback at key points in the EIS process; approximately 300 were returned in the fall of 2000 and over 200 more were returned as of April 2001.

Additional public announcements are planned for upcoming project milestones, including the release of the Final EIS and Record of Decision.

7.5.2 Project Updates

Project updates were sent to a list of key corridor neighborhood, business, and civic organizations, and community television stations to report on progress and developments related to the I-405 Corridor Program. The list also included elected officials, media, and parties who requested notification. Since the project inception, four project updates have been distributed.

7.6 SPEAKERS BUREAU, AGENCY BRIEFINGS, AND IN-PERSON BRIEFINGS

Program staff gave over 150 presentations to interested organizations and community groups as of April 2002. Extensive outreach efforts were made, and efforts continue to identify special populations that would like a presentation and to provide input. Informational materials such as PowerPoint presentations, display materials, overheads, newsletters, and questionnaires were made available to attendees at each presentation. Presentations have included service organizations, chambers of commerce, civic groups, neighborhood organizations, and government agencies (county councils, city councils, and planning organizations). Feedback from these presentations was passed to the program decision-makers.

Program staff has been available since October 1999 to provide in-person briefings to interested officials. These briefings with key elected federal, state, and local officials were routinely held both formally and informally, and are ongoing.

7.7 PROGRAM WEB SITE: COMMUNICATION NEXUS

All project information is available on the I-405 Corridor Program's web site: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/I-405>. Everyone, including the general public, members of the Program's committees, and media have access to all available materials at any time. All program advertising and materials developed for distribution promote the web site as the ultimate source for I-405 Corridor Program information of all types. The web site provides:

- Inter- and intra-committee coordination;
- Full and cost-effective access by public, media, and committee members to technical information;
- Complete on-line program archives; and
- A tool for consensus building between committee members and public. The web site also contains interactive features: an e-mail link for residents to note concerns or ask questions about the program and the opportunity to answer online surveys and questionnaires, and give feedback.

7.8 MEDIA COVERAGE

Program information, issues, concerns and opportunities, and public meetings were widely and openly discussed in numerous regional and community newspapers, radio, and television with a

general audience in the region. As of April 2002, more than 125 print, radio, and television stories had been generated in regional, local, and neighborhood media outlets. In addition to cultivating media coverage for the project, the staff also regularly disseminated program information by:

- Providing letters to the editor;
- Giving presentations to editorial boards with major print media;
- Providing media kits at key milestones; and
- Issuing news releases.

7.9 PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

A random-sample regional telephone survey (1,200 persons) was conducted in February 2001 to provide an understanding of the representative opinions of corridor residents for proposed solutions, as well as the basis for their thinking. The survey was of sufficient sample size to allow for analysis by subregion. Results of the survey are available from WSDOT.

7.10 PROGRAM DATABASE

Beginning with existing databases of stakeholders in the study vicinity, a comprehensive contacts database for the I-405 Corridor Program was created. This database was augmented by contacts established throughout the duration of the program from a variety of sources, including contacts made via web site, e-mail, telephone info-line, questionnaire returns, and participants at all workshops and other events. Information was sent to the database contacts at key project milestones. Contact categories included neighborhood, civic, and business organizations, jurisdictional public information staff, news media, and community television contacts.

7.11 FUTURE PUBLIC REVIEW AND INVOLVEMENT

Following issuance of the Final EIS and a Record of Decision, the program will continue widespread public involvement and information efforts, including additional newsletters, conducting media outreach, updating the I-405 Corridor Program web site, and continuing to provide speakers and presentations throughout the corridor.